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Subject: News Article - Onion: "Government horror story to top all: West Side Soils, shrinking EPA and the soundproof booth" - Montana Standard

http://mtstandard.com/opinion/opinion-government-horror-story-to-top-all-west-side-soils/article_162e02b2-4e1b-5cf0-915e-4ed525458cb4.html

Government horror stories are a dime a dozen these days.

Everybody has their favorite, the one that perfectly epitomizes their notion of what's wrong.

Maybe your favorite du jour is the saga of Tom Price's chartered jets. Or perhaps you're most concerned with staggering levels of bureaucracy getting between fires and firefighting, hugely magnifying damage and danger. Or federal inspectors abusing small businessmen with nonexistent regulations.

All good choices. But hold on. Stand back. Ding Ding Ding. We have a winner.

The Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area Superfund site contains 13 distinct Operable Units. We will focus on the last of them — Operable Unit 13.

For years, it was known as “Non-Priority Soils.”

For optics' sake, a few years ago the site was renamed West Side Soils, we presume because when it comes to environmental cleanup, nobody likes not being a priority. The fact that some of West Side Soils is east of Uptown Butte, some is south and some is west didn't seem to matter. This catchall unit was West Side Soils, and that was that. (If you're confused as to exactly what's included in West Side Soils, so are we. We asked for a map, but we've been told precise borders are not clear. One cannot help but think of the ancient maps with unexplored areas labeled "here be dragons."

Although the name changed, old No. 13's priority did not change.

West Side Soils, for 34 years of Superfund, has been an operable unit in name only. Inoperable unit would be closer to the truth.

EPA blames staff shortages for the fact that Not One Thing has been done there to begin what is called "site characterization" — which is, among other things, an audit of

what contaminants are present that might kill or sicken people. You know, things like lead, arsenic, cadmium and the like.

Last week, EPA's own Inspector General pointed out this outrage as an example of how EPA should better allocate its resources.

Before you get too excited about the chances for this to change because the Inspector General pointed it out, note that in the past 21 years, the EPA's inspector general has pointed out similar "misallocations" in 10 separate reports.

Add to this huge, gooey venti frappuccino of government failure the fact that the new report comes at a time when the Trump administration has recommended a \$300-billion-plus reduction in budget for the Superfund. And, specifically, suggested cutting the enforcement budget — the dollars that finance the government's efforts to get corporate polluters to pay for their toxic legacies.

Now, are you ready for the cherry on top?

On the same week the report was released, documenting the EPA's abject failure to do its job in Butte, it was disclosed that EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt spent \$25,000 of taxpayers' money to build a silent, secure phone booth for himself at EPA headquarters. As Dana Milbank pointed out, the sound of fired bureaucrats cleaning out their desks must have been difficult for Pruitt.

As Jon Tester succinctly said in a letter to Pruitt this week, "This is a waste of taxpayer dollars, which should be put to better use in communities across Montana and this nation that are in desperate need of cleanup."

Butte is used to, take your pick: Being ignored. Being patronized. Getting the short end of the stick.

But this is ridiculous. And thus the winning entry in this week's government horror story anthology.

If Administrator Pruitt makes good on plans to visit Butte this fall, he may wish he could have brought his new soundproof room with him.

Because if this doesn't get people in Butte stirred up and ready to fight for what this town deserves, we don't know what will

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Best regards,

Andrew

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